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ABSTRACT

Educators are beginning to call attention to the failure to integrate right-brain, intuitive, holistic, visual processes into the curriculum. Approaches to right-brain education have characteristically called for the use of slow music, visual imagery, and relaxation techniques. Suggested principles for teaching basic skills include the facts that some learning best takes place when both the teacher and the children are relaxed, and that if the expected learning can be visualized inside the student's head, it will be better understood and retained. There are a variety of techniques to help students achieve a relaxed state, and a variety of techniques to help students become accustomed to visualizing in their minds. Suggested basic skills activities following relaxation include having the student visualize a blackboard and see each word appear as the teacher recites it or working multiplication problems on this imaginary blackboard as the teacher reads them; having students imagine themselves taking a test and being proud as they see themselves getting the answers correct and others telling them how well they did; and having students imagine what happened in a paragraph they just read from a reader or textbook, paying attention to what the people looked like or to the order in which events occurred. (HTH)

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Using Visualization and Relaxation in Learning Basic Skills

The basic rule of remediation which I have taught remedial education students for nearly 20 years, is, "DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT." It is evident that many feel that the whole field of education needs remediation. In this author's estimation, HB 72 has remediated the ills of Texas education in the same way that many of us have taught remedial reading. We gave children more drill on the basal readers. Sometimes we retained them so they could get the same curriculum twice. To some, HB 72 would seem to be only an intensification of the same old problems, not a new solution. To use a Biblical allegory, we keep putting new wine in old wineskins.

If indeed misery loves company, it should be of some comfort to know that other human relations fields are going through the same convulsive self-examinations and the realization that they are generating a great deal more heat than light. In the areas of counseling and psychotherapy, for instance, some iconoclasts note that patients who are not treated at all do as well as if not better than those who receive intensive treatment (Zilbergeld, 1983).

A Historical Question

One of the recently emerging fields of inquiry in psychology and eduction is the Left Brain - Right Brain question. This theory, suggesting that there are two thinking styles, i.e. left brain sequential verbal logic and right brain holistic visual conceptualization, enjoys a status of both emerging empirical investigation and rampant faddism. The two styles of thinking and

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learning are established, their causation is not. (Springer & Deutsch, 1981)

There is something of a philosophical basis for the concept that maybe we have been giving children only half an education in our Western culture, or at least tapping only half of their learning potential.

Plato, it might be remembered, taught that all knowledge comes from inside and is to be drawn out. He believed that there was some existence beyond the empirical world. Plato's ideas held sway in Western education until the Renaissance. These ideas of a non-logical and non-verbal way of thinking have been at the core of the religions of the world. Each pointed to a route of direct experiencing, sometimes called "revelation."

Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that the only valid knowledge was empirical (sensory based) and that the only way to gain knowledge was through the "scientific method." From the Renaissance onward, we have been Aristotelian in our education systems.

And of course, whatever side of the fence we have chosen, we have tended to think in either-or, if A then not B terms, breaking the law of the excluded middle.

In more recent years, some influential thinkers have called our attention to the existence of two modes of thinking, roughly analogous to left-brain, right-brain postulations. Carl Jung, an early disciple of Freud, for instance, postulated that there are two personality types, extroverted (working best with data coming from the outside) and introverted (working best with processes within themselves). He further suggested that each type would be sensate (preference for

dealing with numbers and words) or intuitive (preference for holistic and creative images). Jung did not make these exclusionary categories, simply statements of preference in dealing with the world (Hall & Nordby, 1973).

Some educators are beginning to call to our attention our failure to integrate this "second" mechanism of learnng into our curriculum. Some writers (Witelson, 1977; Newell and Rugel, 1981) have suggested that many children who are identified as "learning disabled" are "right-brain" learners. The similarity with earlier formulations concerning "learning modalities" is striking and perhaps parallel. Dixon (1981) calls our attention to differences in hemisphere function which she believes to be learned preferences, and to the observation that individuals do learn differently. Dixon particularly notes cultural differences in the development of learning styles.

In a recent unpublished lecture on minorities in Texas, Mrs. Williams and Dr. Agulair of Our Lady of the Lake University cited references and their own beliefs that Hispanic and Black children learn in a more holistic and visual manner than do Anglo children. This observation is given support by Springer and Deutsch (1981, p. 188).

A deluge of writers have deplored the avoidance of the education of the right-brain, intuitive, holistic, visual processes and have suggested means of using that part of our learning processes (Ostrander & Schroeder, 1979; Hendricks & Wills, 1975; Hendricks & Robers, 1977; Harrison & Musial, 1978).

Approaches to right-brain education have characteristically called for the use of slow sixty beat per minute music (Ostrander &

Schroeder, 1979), visual imagery (Carrier, et. al, 1983; Fugitt, 1983) and relaxation techniques (Neal, 1980; Barnes, 1976).

Some research evidence has been offered. Relaxation has been used to learn foreign language (Wagner, 1983) and has been used in general memorization in academic areas (Harrison & Musial, 1978). It has been used to accelerate some task performances (Schandler & Dana, 1983) by reduction of physiological tension. Relaxation has also been used to reduce anxiety and enhance performance by music students. (Sweeney & Horman, 1982).

Two studies with relevance to the present consideration are those by Neal (1980) and Barnes (1976) in which a combination of relaxation techniques, visualization, and music to aid in relaxation were shown in controlled studies to have increased the recall of didactic material which was presented verbally. Visual imagery alone increased memory in language-related tasks with elementary school children in studies offered by Levin, et. al (1979) and Carrier, et. al. (1983).

In a recent unpublished study by the writers, sixth grade children were given the task of memorizing the meanings of 100 previously unknown prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Half were given in a routine didactic fashion, half were given in conjunction with relaxation suggestion and Baroque music. Significantly more material was retained under the relaxation condition. The findings were consistent for post-tests given within 24 hours and one week.

Suggested Principles for Teaching Basic Skills

1. Some learning best takes place when both the teacher and the children are relaxed.
2. If the expected learning can be visualized inside one's head,

it will be better understood and retained.

3. Routes to relaxation include: Slow music (without words), attention to deep, slow breathing, and conscious relaxation of muscle groups.
4. Any material, such as words or scenes from a social studies book, can be visualized inside the head.
5. More importantly, if people see themselves as performing an academic task in an adequate manner, their self concept and performance may be changed.

Suggested Classroom Activities for Relaxation

1. Have children sit at desks and contract and then release each muscle group as you describe it. These include: feet, calves, thighs, back, shoulders, neck, face, arms. Talk softly and go very slowly, students having their eyes closed. Tell them to let each part of their body float away. End with a feeling their whole body is floating and bouncing on a cloud.
2. Play slow (baroque) music which is about 60 beats per minute, with no words. Attention need not be called to the music.
3. Wear and use in classroom decorations the relaxing colors, pastels, blues, greens, or white. Avoid black, red, orange, yellow.
4. Have children pay attention to their breathing. Instruct them to breath in and out of their nose, consciously trying to breath more deeply and more slowly. One exercise might be to have them hold 2-3 breaths for as long as they can and then let the breath out slowly.
5. Have the children pretend that they are at the top of a

long staircase. They can't see the bottom. As you count down from 20 to 1, tell them to walk down the staircase in their imagination and feel more relaxed and loose as they go down.

Suggested Activities to Practice Visualization (Do these in a relaxed state.)

1. See inside your head a large bright ball. Watch it begin to fall. Use your mind to hold it up. Make it bounce up and down.
2. Pretend that you see your favorite toy. Make it move and do what you want it to do. Watch it carefully.
3. Pretend that you are in your favorite room. Look around the room. See if anyone is with you. What furniture is in the room? What toys are in the room? (You might want to have some art or writing following this to depict what was seen.)
4. Pretend that you are in a quiet place in the woods or by a lake or by the sea. Look around. Do you see any animals, flowers. Do you hear wind? Do you feel the grass under your feet? (Another opportunity to draw or write a poem.)

An Aside

There are endless variations of relaxation and visualization activities. The references in this paper suggest excellent sources for ideas. Of particular value are: Harrison and Musial, Hendricks and Wills, Hendricks and Roberts, and Fugitt. The reader may be able to create a plethora of ideas for these activiies. We are limited only by our imaginations.

In the following section, suggestions are given which were created by the author to use in classroom and remedial situations.

With the exception of the spelling suggestion which is cited, printed suggestions for these types of applications are not available. Again, once the principles are established, only the limits of your imagination will establish the boundaries of the applications.

Basic Skills Activities Following Relaxation

1. See a large blackboard (in your imagination.) As I read each word, see the word appear on the blackboad. If it is not clear, look at the word on the board (in the book) and then look at the blackboard.
2. Using your blackboard, work these multiplication problems on your blackboard while I read them to you. When I read the correct way to work them, make the changes on your blackboard.
3. Imagine yourself sitting in a quiet safe place, Watch yourself reading and enjoying a book.
4. In your mind, see yourself taking the test. Watch yourself and be proud of yourself as you see yourself getting the answers correct. Be happy as you watch others tell you how well you did.
5. Close your eyes and see a farm with a lot of animals. One of your vocabulary words is written on the side of each animal. Call each animal to you by reading the word. When it comes, pet it.
6. Look at the spelling word on the list. Close your eyes and see the word in your head. Look at each letter fall into place. If the next letter doesn't come, open your eyes to look at the word and then close them again and continue watching the word form. Then open your eyes and write the word (Hill

& Martinis, 1973).

7.After reding the paragraph (section) in your reader (science or social studies book), close your eyes and see what hapened. Pay attention to what the people looked like...in what order things were put together. (This visualization will be strengthened by art, drama, or construction.)

Afterthoughts

In these types of activities, you can have words, prefixes, addition facts, or chemical symbols walking around dressed up funny or doing strange things. The principle is to do whatever it takes to develop a strong visual image.

At first, children may laugh and giggle. The relaxation prelude may be a little rocky because it is strange to them. After a while they will begin to like it. This author knows of many rooms, primary through high school, where these activities are done. They key is the teacher. You must practice this yourself and be comfortable with it. You must be willing to have a few false starts and a few aborts as you establish this style of teaching.

Maybe, just maybe, this all might have something to do with our problems in teaching low-income and ethnic minority children. Maybe we just aren't on their wavelength. I would like to challenge classroom teachers to do some disciplined research on these techniques and let us know in print and at conferences what has happened.

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